

THE VOICE IN THE FOG

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hands like a woman's, quiet of manner yet affable, he was the most picturesque person at the cottage. But there was always something smoldering in those sleepy eyes of his that suggested to Kitty a mockery. It was not that recognizable mockery of all those visiting Englishmen who held themselves complacently superior to their generous American hosts. It was as though he was silently laughing at all he saw, at all that happened about him, as if he stood in the midst of some huge joke which he alone was capable of understanding. So Kitty weighed him.

He did not seem to care particularly for women. He never hovered about them, offering little favors and courtesies; rather, he let them come to him. Nor did he care for dancing. But he was always ready to make up a table at bridge; and a shrewd, capable player he was too.

The music in the ballroom stopped. "Will you be so good, Miss Killigrew, as to tell me why you Americans call a palace like this a cottage?" Sir Henry's voice was pleasing, with only a slight accent.

"I'm sure I do not know. If it were mine, I'd call it a villa."

"Quite properly."

"Do you like Americans?"

"I have no preference for any people. I prefer individuals. I had much rather talk to an enlightened Chinaman than to an unenlightened white man."

"I am afraid you are what they call blasé."

"Perhaps I am not quite at ease yet. I was buffeted about a deal in the old days."

Sir Henry dropped back into the wicker chair in the deep shadow. Kitty did not move. She wondered what Thomas was doing. (Thomas was rubbing ointment on his raw knuckles.)

"I am very fond of the sea," remarked Sir Henry. "I have seen some odd parts of it. Every man has his Odyssey, his Æneid."

Æneid! It seemed to Kitty that her body had turned that instant into marble as cold as that under her palms.

The coal of the man's cigar glowed intermittently. She could see nothing else.

Æneid—Enid!

CHAPTER XVI

THOMAS slammed the ball with a force that carried it far over the wire backstop.

"You must not drive them so hard, Mr. Webb; at least, not up. Drive them down. Try it again."

Tennis looked so easy from the side lines that Thomas believed all he had to do was to hit the ball whenever he saw it within reach; but after a few experiments he accepted the fact that every game required a certain talent, quite as distinct as that needed to sell green neckties (old stock) when the prevailing fashion was polka-dot blue. How he loathed Thomas Webb! How he loathed the impulse that had catapulted him into this mad whirligig! Why had not Fate left him in peace; if not satisfied with his lot, at least resigned? And now must come this confrontation, the inevitable! No poor rat in a trap could have felt more harassed. Mentally he went round and round in circles; but he could find no exit. There is no file to saw the bars of circumstance.

The lithe young figure on the other side of the net, here, there, backward and forward, alert, accurate, bubbling with energy—once, a mad, rollicking impulse seized and urged him to vault the net and take her in his arms and hold her still for a moment. But he knew. She was using him as an athlete uses a trainer before a real contest.

There was something more behind his stroke than mere awkwardness. It was downright savagery. Generally when a man is in anger or despair he longs to smash things; and these inoffensive tennis balls were to Thomas a gift of the gods. Each time one sailed away over the backstop it was like the pop of a safety valve: it averted an explosion.

"That will be enough," cried Kitty, as the last of a dozen balls sailed toward the distant stables.

The tennis courts were unken, and round them ran a parapet of lawn, crisp and green, with marble benches opposite the posts, generally used as judges' seats. On one of these Kitty sat down and began to fan herself. Thomas walked over and sat down beside her. The slight gesture of her hand had been a command.

It was early morning, before breakfast; still and warm and breathless, a forerunner of a long, hot summer day. A hundred

yards to the south lay the sea, shimmering as it sprawled lazily upon the tawny sands. The propinquity of a pretty girl and a lonely young man has founded more than one story.

"You'll be enjoying the game, once you learn it."

"Do you think I ever shall?" asked Thomas. He bent forward and began tapping the clay with his racket. How to run away!

KITTY, as she looked down at his head, knew that there were a dozen absurd wishes in her heart, none of which could possibly ever become facts. He was so different from the self-assertive young men she knew, with their silly flirtations, their inane small talk, their capacity for Scotch whisky and long hours. For days she had studied him as through microscopic lenses. His guilelessness was real. It just simply could not be! Her ears had deceived her that memorable foggy night in London! And yet always in the dark his voice was that of one of the two men who had talked near her cab. Who was he? Not a single corner of the veil had he yet lifted, and here it was, the middle of August, and, except for the week at Bar Harbor, she had been with him day by day, laid she knew not how many traps, over which he had stepped serenely, warily, or unconsciously, she could not tell which. It made her heart ache; for, manly and simple as he appeared, honest as he seemed, he was either a rogue or the dupe of one, which was almost as bad. But tonight she was determined to learn which he was.

"What have you done with the romance?"

"I have put it away in the bottom of my trunk. The seventh rejection convinces me that I am not a storyteller." He had a desperate longing to tell her all, then and there. It was too late. He would be arrested as a smuggler, turned out of the house as an impostor.

"Don't give up so easily. There are still ninety-three other editors waiting to read it."

"I have my doubts. Still, it was a pleasant pastime." He sat back and stared at the sea. He must go this day! He must invent some way of leaving!

Then came the Machiavellian way; only, he managed as usual to execute it in his blundering English style. Without warning he dropped his racket, caught Kitty in his arms tightly and roughly, kissed her cheek, rose, and strode swiftly across the courts into the villa. It was done! He could go now—he knew very well he had to go.

HIS subsequent actions were methodical enough—a shower, a thorough rub-down, and then into his workaday clothes. He packed his trunk and hand luggage, overlooked nothing that was his, and went down to the living room, where he knew he would find Killigrew with the morning papers. He felt oddly light-headed; but he had no time to analyze the cause.

"Good morning, Thomas," greeted the master of the house cordially.

"I am leaving, Mr. Killigrew. Will you be kind enough to let me have the use of the motor to the station?"

"Leaving? What's happened? What's the matter? Young man, what the devil's this about?"

"I am sorry, Sir, but I have insulted Miss Killigrew."

"Insulted Kitty?" Killigrew sprang up.

"Just a moment, Sir," warned Thomas. The tense, short, but powerful figure of Kitty's father was not at that moment an agreeable thing to look at; and Thomas knew that those knotted hands were rising toward his throat. "Do not misinterpret me, Sir. I took Miss Kitty in my arms and kissed her."

"You—kissed—Kitty?" Killigrew fell back into his chair, limp. For a moment there had been black murder in his heart; now he wondered whether to weep or laugh. The reaction was too sudden to admit of coherent thought. "You kissed Kitty?" he repeated mechanically.

"Yes, Sir."

"What did she do?"

"I did not wait to learn, Sir."

Killigrew got up and walked the length of the room several times, his chin in his collar, his hands clasped behind his back under his coattails. The fifth passage carried him out on the veranda. He kept on going, and disappeared among the lilac hedges.

Thomas thought he understood this action, that his inference was perfectly logical: Killigrew, rather than strike the man who had so gratuitously insulted his daughter,

had preferred to run away. (I know; for a long time I too believed Thomas the most colossal ass since Dobson.) Thomas gazed mournfully about the room. It was all over! He had burnt his bridges. It had been so pleasant, so homelike; and he had begun to love these unpretentious people as if they had been his very own!

Except that which had been expended on clothes, Thomas had most of his salary. It would carry him along till he found something else to do. To get away immediately, that was the main idea. He had found a door to the trap. (The chamois bag lay in his trunk, forgotten.)

"Your breakfast is ready, Sir," announced the grave butler.

So Thomas ate his chops and potatoes and toast and drank his tea, alone.

And Killigrew, blinking tears, leaned against the stout branches of the lilacs and buried his teeth in his coat sleeve. He was as near apoplexy as he was ever to come.

CHAPTER XVII

MEANTIME Kitty sat on the bench, stunned. Never before in all her life had such a thing happened. True, young men had at times attempted to kiss her; but not in this fashion. A rough embrace, a kiss on her cheek, and he had gone. Not a word, not a sign of apology! She could not have been more astounded had a thunderbolt struck at her feet, nor more bereft of action. She must have sat there fully ten minutes without movement. From Thomas the guileless—this! What did it mean? She could not understand. Had he instantly begged forgiveness, had he made protestations of sentiment, a glimmering would have been hers. Nothing! He had kissed her and walked away: as he might have kissed Celeste—and had, for all she knew!

When the numbing sense of astonishment passed away, it left her cold with anger. Kitty was a dignified young lady, and she would not tolerate such an affront from any man alive. It was more than an affront: it was a dire catastrophe. What should she do now? What would become of all her wonderfully maneuvered plans?

She went directly to her room and flung herself upon the bed, bewildered and unhappy. And there Killigrew found her. He was a wise old man, deeply versed in humanity, having passed his way up through



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